

"A Walk in My Shoes" Generates Awareness About Sexual Violence

Issue

"My mom walked in to find me with my pajamas on the floor and my Dad beside me in bed. He had been hurting me for months, but I didn't know who to tell."

- Female, 8, Columbia, S.C.

This story appeared on a tag tied to a pair of small black patent leather Mary Jane shoes, which were placed on the S.C. Statehouse steps along with 3,000 other pairs of shoes symbolizing the state's sexual assault during 2003.

A staggering 84 percent of all rapes go unreported, according to the National Crime Victimization Survey. The number of forcible rapes reported to law enforcement in South Carolina was only about 25 percent of the number of clients served in the state's 16 sexual assault centers. Ongoing medical concerns resulting from rape mean victims' visits to physicians increase 18 to 56 percent in the two years following assault. The result: rape and sexual assault costs about \$127 billion annually or \$508 per U.S. resident, according to the National Institute of Justice.

Intervention

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control is working to make the public aware of the sexual violence problem and the services available to victims.

- On April 12, 2005, DHEC Sexual Assault Program co-sponsored "A Walk In My Shoes:" An Event to End Sexual Violence.
- Concerned citizens, sexual assault survivors, health and human service workers, rape crisis center advocates and staff marched to the S.C. Statehouse, where steps were lined with shoes representing sexual assault victims. On-lookers stopped to ask about the shoes and stayed for the rally, which featured survivors' stories, statistics, songs, and empowerment strategies to end sexual violence in South Carolina.
- After the Columbia event, the state's 16 sexual assault centers sponsored education and prevention programs in their communities. The Columbia event will be held annually, and the next will be in April 2006.

Impact

The event generated public awareness through:

- Helping increase the number of direct clients seeking services at centers. Numbers jumped 33 percent from March 2005 through April 2005. Hotline calls from centers increased 10 percent during the same time period;
- Attracting more than 300 volunteers, who planned and executed the event;
- Generating statewide media coverage from three television stations; 12 radio stations, and newspapers including *The State*, *The Sumter Item*, *The Anderson Independent Mail*, *The Camden Chronicle*, and *The Times Democrat* of Orangeburg; and
- Sparking other awareness and education events around the state such as an original play attracting more than 400 people, a prayer walk with 150 participants and shoe displays at malls and courthouses.

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